

The Alleged Transmission of Greek Thinking Concepts Into Arabic Grammar: Is It Still Relevant?

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- **WHY I CHOSE THIS TOPIC TO BE
DISCUSSED IN THIS CONFERENCE?**

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- BECAUSE BEFORE 20TH CENTURY THE WEST and ORIENTALIST BELIEVED ON THE INFLUENCE OF GREEK ON ARABIC GRAMMAR.

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- HOWEVER IN THE MID OF 20TH CENTURY WHEN THE RENAISSANCE OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT INTRODUCED BY NOAM CHOMSKY , THE CLAIM OR THE ALLEGED TRANSMISSION FROM GREEK INTO ARABIC GRAMMAR UNACTIVE.

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- The paper consists of three sub topics, they are:
- 1) The first encounter with Ancient Greek Thinking
- 2) The formal development of Greek Grammar
- The opponents of a Greek influence on Arabic Grammar

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- OUR DISCUSSION WILL CONCENTRATE ON PART 3 WHICH IS
 - The opponents of a Greek influence on Arabic Grammar

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- Merx in his book *Historia artis grammarticae apud syros* tried to prove the dependence of Arabic grammar on Greek logic, he used mainly terminology resemblance. His most important arguments were: 1) the notion of declension (*irab*); 2) the division of words into three parts of speech; 3) the distinction of two genders; 4) the distinction of three tenses; 5) local and temporal adverbs (*zarf*); 6) condition (*hal*).

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- It is questionable whether his arguments prove the influence Greek grammar and not rather the influence of Greek logic?

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- Because Greek grammar was after all based on logic and a semantic approach as recorded in Aristotle's 'Category' (circa 387 -335 B.C).

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It is also questionable to relate the above idea to the text of the *Tekhne Grammatike* by Dionysios Thrax since the authenticity of the manuscript itself is doubtful.

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- In order to understand that Arabic grammar evolved completely independently from Greek and was not influenced by it:

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- we shall direct our attention to the research done by those who have strictly opposed the notion of Greek influence.

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- The linguist and philosopher J. Weiss stressed the high level of consistency and regularity of Arabic grammar and vigorously opposed any idea of Greek and Latin influence. Weiss argues as follows:

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- *If the case is, that just like with grammar and philosophy it is a scientific system, the attempt to prove an influence on the basis of occasional similarities seems to be little successful in as far as the many differences paralyse the conclusiveness of congruences substantially, as we should not overlook that a system represents an entity, and that it is psychologically totally unlikely that a single term out of it should have wandered like an erratic block without taking traces of its next proximity with it*

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- Weiss noted that it is methodologically wrong to judge the influence of Greek and Latin on Arabic grammar based on one isolated term, since every term is part of a complicated system, without which it is meaningless (C.H. Versteegh, 1977:12).

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- We can assume that the Arabic phonetic signs comprising of *dommah*, *fathah* and *kasrah* have its origins in older languages such as Syrian, Hebrew, Persian and Sanskrit.

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- The usage of Arabic short vowels had been introduced by Abu Aswad ad-Duali:

• إِذَا رَأَيْتَنِي قَدْ فَتَحْتُ فَمِّي بِالْحَرْفِ فَأَنْقُطْ نُقْطَةً فَوْقَهُ عَلَى أَعْلَاهُ،
فَإِنْ ضَمَمْتُ فَمِّي فَأَنْقُطْ نُقْطَةً بَيْنَ يَدَيِّ الْحَرْفِ، وَإِنْ كَسَرْتُ
فَأَجْعَلِ النُّقْطَةَ تَحْتُ، فَإِنْ أَتْبَعْتُ شَيْئًا مِنْ ذَلِكَ عَنْهُ فَأَجْعَلْ مَكَانَ
النُّقْطَةِ نُقْطَتَيْنِ"

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- We believe the micro system of Arabic grammar has to have been developed by the Arabs themselves, especially in confirmation of the theory of *Āmil* in their grammar.

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- What is Amil?

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It is a

- Classical Arabic had eight cases: accusative (*nasab*), genitive (*jar*), nominative (*raf*), apocopate (*jazm*), a-vowel (*fath*), i-vowel (*kasr*), u-vowel (*dam*) and zero-vowel (*waqf*).

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- Sibawayh divided the endings of the eight cases into four pairs: the accusative and a-vowel, the genitive and i-vowel, the nominative and u-vowel, and lastly the apocopate and zero-vowel.

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- A word which receives different pairs because it is produced by a governor, its ending is not permanent and will be changed based on its position and use in the sentence. This system can be called the process of governing or the concept of *al-amil*.

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- This phenomenon had been found in the case of *Tanāzuñ*, on the other hand, two governors govern one governee as in Amrū Ibn al-Ḳais's verse:

• فلو أن ما أسعى لأدنى معيشة * كفاني، ولم أطلب قليل من المال

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- One of the strictest rules in Arabic syntactic theory is precisely that one governor can never govern more than one element at the same time, for instance in the verse quoted above the words *kafani* and *walam atlob* are *al-Āmils*.

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- He didn't say *kalilan* but *kalilun* with *dommah* meant it is belong to *kafani* nor *walam atlob*. This verse indicates that Arabic was not influenced by Greek thinking at the time that Amrū Ibn al-Ḳais introduced the system of *al-Āmil* accidentally. Whereby he leaved in jahily's period.

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- This point has been supported by Versteegh who says: "We do not assert that Arabic linguistic thinking was a copy of Greek grammar, but we do believe that the instruction of Greek grammar was the model and the starting point for Arabic grammar" C.H.M. Versteegh, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking*, p.15.

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- A differing opinion on the independence of Arabic from Greek grammar was expressed by H. Fleisch who wrote:

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- *The Arabic grammarians have worked with their Arabic mentality; the description of grammatical categories is Arabic, the ordering or insertion into a system is Arabic, so may say that, of all the Islamic sciences, the grammar is may be the one which has been the least subordinate to exterior influences and has remained the purest.*

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- He refuted the influence of Greek grammar on Arabic grammatical theory but agreed that it certainly was influenced by Aristotelian logic since most of the Arab Grammarians were emphasizing on conceptual issues.

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- Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani for example engaged a lot in semantic and conceptual meanings, but to say that his ideas were all derived from Aristotelian logic would be unjustified.

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- According to Jurjani, the relationship between syntax and semantics has not been effectively clarified within the framework of traditional Arabic grammatical theory.

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- In his commentary he differentiated between meaning and form in a sentence.
- This concept is presented not to linguists but theologians (*mu`tazilah*) in impressing them with the need to study not only theology but also grammar and literary theory in order to improve their understanding of the inimitability of the Qur'an.

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- In this case, the concept of *nazm* combines three aspects, namely 1) *lafza hāmil*, 2) *ma'na bihi qā'im*, 3) *ribād lahumā nāzim*.

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- What is *lafza hāmil*?

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- *What is ma'na bihi qā'im?*

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- *What is ribād lahuma nāzim?*
- *The lafaz must be concise the meaning in a form style such as*
 - زید منطلق، منطلق زید، المنطلق زید، زید
 - المنطلق

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- He further argued that one could not arrive at the proper meaning if not constructed with *lafaz* and *rabat* in order to produce a *nazm*. In other words, those who achieve true eloquence (*fasāhah*) will not produce a coherent sentence unless they combine the group of words according to their concurrence followed by the meaning.

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- Another man who believed Arabic Grammar free from any intruder was M.G. Carter denied any Hellenistic influence in the following words: ***“I hope the following pages that the evidence adduced by the Hellenists on the point reached by Arabic grammar in the crucial period of the eight century should be rejected, because it is based on a dubious interpretation of the grammar of the later period, and because it is contradicted by the al-kitab itself”***

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- From the above analysis, it has become clear that grammar (*nahw*) investigates the syntactic relation between the words of an utterance. These examples are basically concerned with the function of case endings in the sentence.

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- According to him, Greek influence has to be ruled out because of lack of evidence. There is no reference to suggest foreign influences in the indigenous accounts of the earliest Arabic grammarians.

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- He adds: “*The most obvious weakness of the Greek hypothesis is that it has never been confronted with Arabic grammar itself or rather, that the Hellenists have never defined the kind of Arabic grammar itself or rather, that the Hellenists have never defined the kind of grammar which they claim was borrowed from Greek*”.

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- Then, he stresses that “*it will be necessary to show that the Kitāb is the first grammatical work in the Arabic language*”

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- He believed that every form of linguistic study preceding Sibawayh i.e. the period of orthographical innovations and the period of the group of *nahwiyyun* had been the work of amateurs. Sibawayh was the first real grammarians in his *Kitāb*, he brilliantly undertook to assemble the linguistic facts, which form part of social system into a *juridical* corpus.

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- By noted that the grammar in Sibawayh's *Kitab* clearly unrelated to the Greek system based on logic when he says "***I have already alluded to the fact that there was no term for `grammar` in Sibawaihi`s time, and I outlined the stages whereby the word nahw ultimately acquired this technical sense***"

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- He also highlighted that Sibawayh and Aristotle have very different interest in *harf* which was identical with the Greek *fone asemos* but defined from a totally different point of view.

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- Aristotle says that the particle has a definite function but no specific meaning while for Sibawayh the *harf* has a some kind of meaning (*jā`a li ma`nan*) but no specific function. In order to ensure the grammar of Sibawahi was original at that time of Sibawayh`s activities there existed an abstract legal system set up by Islamic lawyers in order to analyze laws and traditions.

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- In order to support that Arabic grammar was influenced by Islamic Law, Carter presents two important points.

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- He adduces four important terminological arguments, namely the use of moral criteria in grammar '*hassan*' (good), '*qabīh*' (bad), secondly the *qiyas* as a juridical method, thirdly the terminology of *mawdi*, etc. derived from the study of law, and fourthly numerous linguistic terms with a juridical connotation (e.g. '*shart*' (condition), '*iwad*' (compensation), '*badal*' (replacement), '*hadd*' (limitation), '*hujjah*' (argument), '*niyyah*' (intention)).

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- G. Troupeau refuted the statement by Merx with the words “ *I have made the point that it is unlikely that Sibawayh, who died circa 796 a.d., would have known the logic of Aristotle and been influenced by it, and this for two reasons: the first being that the Hermeneutics and the poetics were not translated into Arabic until approximately a century after the death of Sibawayhi; the Hermeneutics by Ishaq Ibn Hunayn (d. 910), the poetics by Matta Ibn Yunus (d. 940). The second reason is that the grammatical terms used by these two translators, with a few exceptions, either do not exist in the work of Sibawayhi or differ significantly from the terms which he employs, as may be observed from the following list*”.

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- Words 1) Letter :Ibn Ishaq called *ustuquss*, Sibawayh called *harf*, 2) Syllable: Ibn Ishaq called *iqtidab*, Ibn Matta called *maqta`*, Sibawayh called *absent*, 3) Conjunction: IbIs. called *ribat*, Sib. called *harf `atof*, 4) Article: IbI. called *wasila*, Sib. called *absent*, 5) Verb: IbI. and Matta called *kalima*, Sib. called *fi`il*.

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Conclusion

- In conclusion, the concept of Arabic grammar has originated from Islamic Law and not by the transmission of Hellenistic grammatical concepts. Arabic grammatical theory was never exposed to Hellenistic thinking and developed in complete independence of it. Textual evidence of an alleged influence is lacking. Nevertheless, the Hellenistic institutions established in the East certainly did play an important role in the spread of Greek ideas in other disciplines.

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Thank You

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